

Crash course

What are the most dangerous intersections in Duxbury, and what can we do about them?

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Thank God for the forsythias. The large flowering bushes at the edge of Jeanne White's property are often what keeps a car from skidding off the road into her living room.

SPECIAL REPORT

White and her husband Mike live in a brown-shingled home at the corner of Route 53 and Winter Street. The house is set back from the road – a good thing for the Whites, as they have seen more accidents at the intersection than they can count.

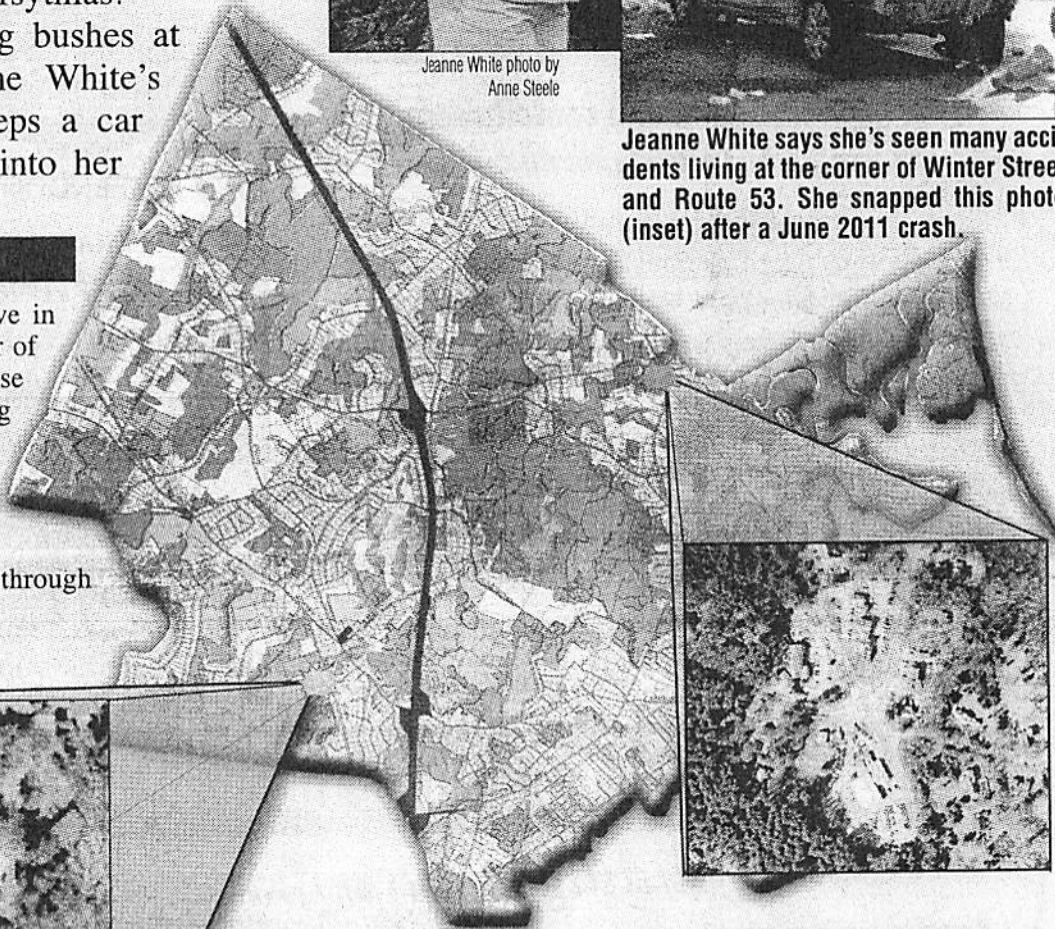
"We've had the lawn torn up eight or nine times – because they come through and land on the lawn," White said.

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Jeanne White photo by
Anne Steele

Jeanne White says she's seen many accidents living at the corner of Winter Street and Route 53. She snapped this photo (inset) after a June 2011 crash.



Satellite images from GIS/Duxbury Town Web site

HOT SPOTS: The intersection of Route 53 and Winter Street (at left) is often spoken of as one of the most dangerous intersections in town. It is a place with a high incidence of crashes, according to MassHighway engineers, but it's far from the only trouble spot. Cox's Corner (above) saw the most crashes – 25 – during the study period, from 2005-2008. Police officials say the odd angle at the intersections of Church, Tremont and Enterprise streets can cause roll-over accidents.

Accidents 10/8

SPECIAL REPORT:

Duxbury Clipper

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Danger on the roadways

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The intersection is often regarded as one of the most dangerous in Duxbury. According to raw crash data provided by MassHighway, there were 12 accidents at the intersection between the years 2005 and 2008 (the most recent year MassHighway provides the data. Only accidents reported by the police that involve over \$1,000 in damage are reported. See sidebar below for more information.)

More recently, the Whites were rudely greeted by an early morning accident on Thursday, June 16.

"We were just getting ready for work and heard the crash," White said. "When you hear it, it's incredible – the impact is so severe. I just went and called 911 immediately."

At this point, White had only heard the sound of the crash, she hadn't seen what had actually happened.

"Then I saw one car up on Winter Street and I thought 'well, who hit her or who did she hit?' I went to the other window and there's the white van."

A white SUV had skidded onto the lawn, plowing through the bushes and only stopping inches from the side of the house.

"This poor fella in the white van said, 'I tried not to hit your house.'"

The driver crossing Winter Street never saw the SUV, White said. Many drivers who have been in accidents at this crossing complain of a "blind spot" that prevents motorists on Winter Street from seeing oncoming traffic.

White is worried that someday an accident will be more than an inconvenience to her family.

"One of these days it's going to come through the house."

State officials have recognized the problems at the intersection, and are proposing a roundabout. A preliminary hearing was held in October of 2009, and MassHighway engineer John Diaz said the issue isn't so much the number of

accidents, but the frequency. Speed was the major problem, he said, and the roundabout would work to slow down motorists.

At the end of the hearing, Diaz and a fellow engineer promised the state would return with another hearing when the design was 75 percent complete, and that construction would likely begin in 2010 and finish in the fall of 2011. However, no follow up was ever done and the intersection remains as it ever was, a blinking yellow light the lone warning to drivers. (Read more in the second story in this series, to be published in a future Clipper, which will explore the politics of how roadway improvements are made.)

Edna Cuneo was in an accident at the intersection on Jan. 20 of this year. However, she said it wasn't the design of the intersection that caused the problem – it was nature.

"One of these days it's going to come through the house."

– Jeanne White, talking about accidents at Winter Street and Route 53.

"There was a huge snow-bank on my left," she said. "That's the whole story right there ... I could not see."

Cuneo was coming from Winter Street, trying to cross Route 53. A driver on the other side of Winter Street flashed his lights, making her think it was safe to cross.

"The next thing I know I hit the brakes, I could hear the car coming," she said.

The accident was scary, but no one was seriously injured.

"If I could have backed up a couple feet she wouldn't have hit me," Cuneo added.

While it wasn't the main cause of her accident, she believe speed is a major factor in crashes there.

"People do fly on that road," she said of Route 53. "You have to look left and right."

While it often gets the most attention, the Winter Street intersection isn't the only dangerous intersection in town.

Danger in numbers

From 2005-2008 there were 744 reported motor vehicle crashes in Duxbury. The highest number was 264 in 2005, and the lowest was 134

in 2006. (For the purpose of this story, crashes that took place on Route 3 within Duxbury's borders were not included.) There were two fatalities, one in 2007 and one in 2006, although the 2006 crash was on Route 3 at an overpass.

Fifty-seven percent of accidents involved property damage only, and 30 percent involved at least one injury (13 percent of crashes did not report whether or not anyone was injured.)

The accidents also have some identifiable trends. Most accidents took place, not in the dead of night, but in the morning, between the hours of 6 a.m. and noon. Fifty-eight per-

cent of crashes involved two cars; one-car crashes accounted for 36 percent of accidents in town. Duxbury is also not a town that has multi-car pileups – only 5 percent of crashes involved three cars or more.

Most of the accidents involved motorists hitting another car. However, between the 2005 and 2008, 39 drivers struck a tree, 28 hit guardrails and 23 crashed into utility poles.

Pinpointing the exact spot in Duxbury that poses the most danger to drivers is difficult. Some of the data provided by MassHighway does not list the exact location of a crash on a particular street, which means

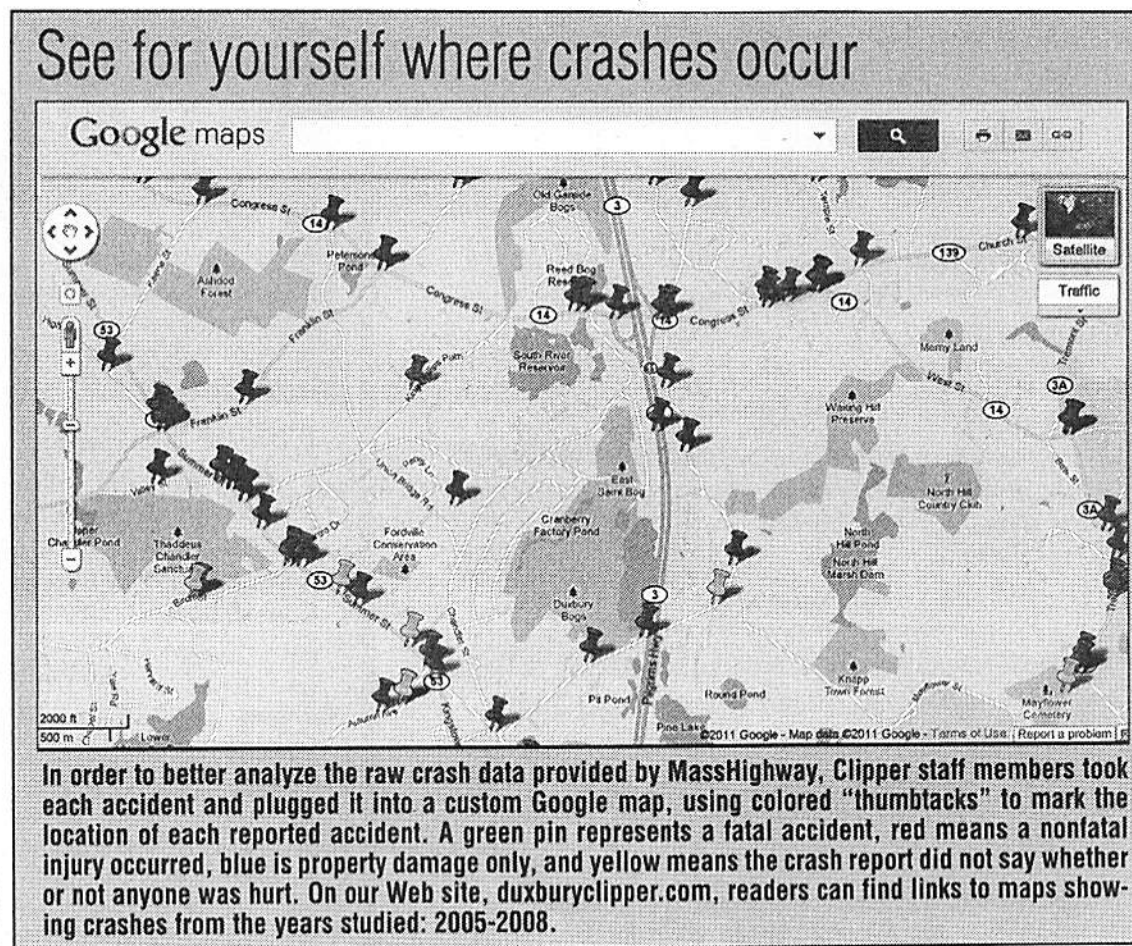
it may have been at an intersection. Different roads have different traffic volumes as well, which means more well-travelled roads may have more crashes, even though a neighborhood corner may have a higher crash rate.

Even so, some conclusions can be drawn. In terms of sheer numbers, Cox's Corner, where Tremont Street, Church Street and Enterprise Street meet, is one dangerous place to drive.

During the period studied there were a total of 25 reported accidents there, including six where at least one person was injured (four accident re-

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Exit 10 off Route 3, on the Duxbury/Kingston line, was the scene of a number of accidents, including the one at right, which occurred April 23, 2009. More accidents occur here – 26 during the study period – than at Exit 10, where conditions have improved since a roundabout was installed at Lincoln and Congress streets.



How we got the numbers

Crash data for years 2005 through 2008 are derived from the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) Crash Data System (CDS). Numbers are not available after 2008. The RMV obtains crash reports from local police, State Police, other police agencies, and operators (motorists) who were involved in crashes. The reporting threshold is the same for all years: any injury or fatality, or damage to any one vehicle or other personal property in excess of \$1,000. Crash data are not completely standardized. Several different variations of a street name (or other field) may exist.

Source: MassHighway supplemental data

Duxbury's dangerous roads

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ports did not say whether or not anyone was hurt.)

Just what makes this intersection so treacherous? There is a large volume of Duxbury Beach traffic, both from Tremont Street and a sign on West Street, near the police station, that directs motorists along Route 139 (Church Street) into Cox's Corner. There are also a number of businesses in the area, the now-defunct Millbrook Motors, and a number of shops in a complex just beyond the intersection.

The intersection is also at a funky angle, which can create a visibility problem.

"It's not a traditional T," said Police Chief Matthew Clancy, who said police respond to a lot of rollover accidents in the area. "A lot of our intersections are offset."

Drivers heading along Route 139 toward Marshfield and the beach have to make an angled turn at the intersection. However, motorists traveling along Route 3A are moving in

a relatively straight line and are often moving at a high rate of speed.

Indeed, most of the accidents in Duxbury during the study period were reported as being at an angle (28 percent of total crashes, 42 percent of multi-car crashes) followed by rear-end crashes (21 percent of total crashes, 31 percent of multi-car accidents.)

Highway to trouble

It's of little surprise that the high volume of traffic at the highway exits off Route 3 create a lot of accidents. Looking at the data, however, it becomes obvious that the Exit 10 exchanges, near the Kingston line, have more crashes and more injuries.

From 2005-2008, there were 14 accidents at Exit 11, including the on/off ramps and the traffic circle at Lincoln and Congress. Of these, only two involved injuries (one was unreported.)

During the same period, there were 26 accidents at Exit 10 – and nine of them involved

injury.

Police officials said that years ago they saw similar numbers at Exit 11 – many severe crashes including fatalities – before the roundabout was put in. The roundabout has the effect of slowing traffic coming off the ramps towards Duxbury as well as slowing drivers headed for the highway.

"It was bad," said Duxbury Police Sergeant Michael Carbone. "It's worked, it's slowed people down."

"It clearly is the most efficient way to get traffic through a multiple road intersection," added Clancy.

The roundabout was the first of its kind in the state, and the project planned for Winter Street and Route 53 would be similar. The logistics of Exit 10 don't seem to lend themselves to a roundabout, but there has been talk of placing traffic lights there – in fact, as part of the comprehensive permit for the Island Creek af-

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Duxbury's dangerous roads

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the development company had pledged to put a traffic light at the entrance to Island Creek Village. There has been some debate over what exactly the company is responsible for, and that light would be part of a larger state construction project where an additional two lights (for a total of three) would be put near the exit.

The idea of traffic lights isn't pleasing to everyone. Many Duxbury residents take pride in being a one-stoplight town. (The only fully functioning traffic light is at the intersection of Tremont, West and St. George streets. This light has not proved a cure-all for accidents, however. There were 14 accidents during the study period, seven of them with reported injuries.)

Others simply believe lights won't solve the problem at Exit 10.

"You're not going to cure that intersection with lights," said John Hamilton, who was in an accident at Exit 10 on Aug. 6, 2006. "It would be counterproductive to the flow of traffic."

Hamilton said a driver coming up the road from Hanaford's in Kingston struck another car, which careened into his vehicle.

"Took out two of my doors and two of my tires," he said.

The drivers of the other cars were injured, but Hamilton was unhurt, and went to calm the female driver of the first car, who appeared to be in shock.

In this case, the design of the intersection wasn't the likely cause of the crash. Hamilton said both drivers were in their 80s and it was more likely a case of driver error.

Fatal danger on Franklin

Another intersection often pegged as a danger spot is also on Route 53, at the intersection with Franklin Street. A Middleboro woman was killed in this spot in June. (See sidebar on page 7.)

Like the Winter Street crossing, drivers on Franklin Street often have difficulty seeing traffic coming down 53 in both directions.

"There's a curve coming from the south, you have to nudge out to see," said Mike McAuley, who lives on Sawmill Road near the intersection. He used to live near the Winter Street crossing as well.

On Aug. 6 of this year, he and a neighbor heard the noise of a three-car accident at the intersection while setting up for a block party.

"We just heard the

screeching and the crash," he said. At least one of the drivers involved was injured and trapped in his or her car after the crash.

Residents who live in the neighborhood consider the intersection so dangerous, that they will often find alternate routes, such as High Street. McAuley thinks speed is the major factor — especially the traffic on Route 53.

"You're not going to cure that intersection with lights ...
It would be counterproductive to the flow of traffic."

— John Hamilton on Exit 10



The intersection of Franklin Street and 53, pictured above, was the site of a recent fatal crash. Duxbury Police examined the intersection's history of crashes and determined most of the accidents here are caused by people travelling East on Franklin Street (the direction of the arrow) who fail to stop at the stop sign.

Clipper Intern Anne Steele contributed to this report

Part 2 of this special report will focus on the possible solutions to traffic problems and dangerous intersections around town, and how the often ponderous process for roadway improvements works. Look for it in an upcoming Clipper.

"People are just flying through," he said.

And it's not just neighbors. In response to the fatal crash and others, Duxbury Police officers took a look at the intersection and filed a report.

Police looked at 19 crashes between the years 2001 and 2010, to try to find a pattern in the "at fault" vehicle.

"Therefore, with 12 crashes fitting our criteria [traveling East on Franklin Street], 63 percent of all accidents at this intersection involve vehicles that are traveling east of Franklin Street and fail to stop at the stop sign," the report, authored by Thomas Brown, reads.

So why are drivers not stopping? It could be people unfamiliar with the area (McAuley said Franklin is often used as a cut-through for people trying to reach Route 27) or it could be poor signage.

"Of the 12 crashes fitting the criteria, seven were operated by nonresidents who could possibly be unfamiliar with the area and did not realize that they were approaching an intersection. The possibility also exists that the design of the intersection and placement of signage may not be optimal to alert drivers that they are approaching an intersection," wrote Brown, who pointed out the actual stop sign is obscured by a telephone pole (there is a "stop ahead" sign before the intersection itself.)

Jeanne White said unfa-

miliarity may also contribute to problems at Winter Street.

"I don't think out-of-towners know there's a stop sign there on Winter Street," she said. "The majority of the time, accidents happen because someone has gone through the stop sign."

Poor design to blame?

The Franklin Street/Route 53 intersection isn't the only place where people believe bad line of sight or signage contributes to the problem. But it's difficult to separate roadway design from driver error.

"You can't blame it all on the drivers," said White of her troubled intersection. "I really don't know why they don't have the concept that that is an intersection. People say 'Oh I never saw the sign,' and the people who got hit say that the other person never stopped."

Almost everyone agrees that speed is a factor in many of the crashes. Streets like Route 53 or Tremont Street have posted speed limits of between 30-45 miles per hour, depending on where you are. Yet many drivers – some perhaps not familiar with the area – treat them like highways and race around corners and through what they believe will be straightaways. (Speed limits are set at the state level.)

"Speed is an incredible problem on 53," said White.

"I always use precautions," added McAuley. "I go 40 miles per hour on 53."

Whatever the causes – and potential solutions – of accidents are, White hopes something is done soon.

"It's way overdue," she said. "It's almost suicidal out there – you take life in your hands."

TRAGEDY ON THE ROAD

Most of the crashes plotted for this special report involve property damage or nonlife threatening injuries. However, there have been several fatal accidents in Duxbury over the past several years.

In September of 2007, the community was stunned when an accident on Union Bridge Road, near the intersection with Franklin Street claimed the life of Duxbury High School senior Steven Laramée, and left Laramée's brother Eoin and friend Spencer Meine hospitalized.

Laramée was remembered as a funny, sweet student who hated Harry Potter but loved life, during a candlelight vigil the following Sunday afternoon at the Town green.

In June of 2011, a Middleboro woman was killed at the intersection of Franklin Street and Route 53.

Duxbury police and fire units were dispatched to the report of a three-car accident at the intersection of Summer Street and Franklin Street at 9:45 a.m. on Thursday, June 11.

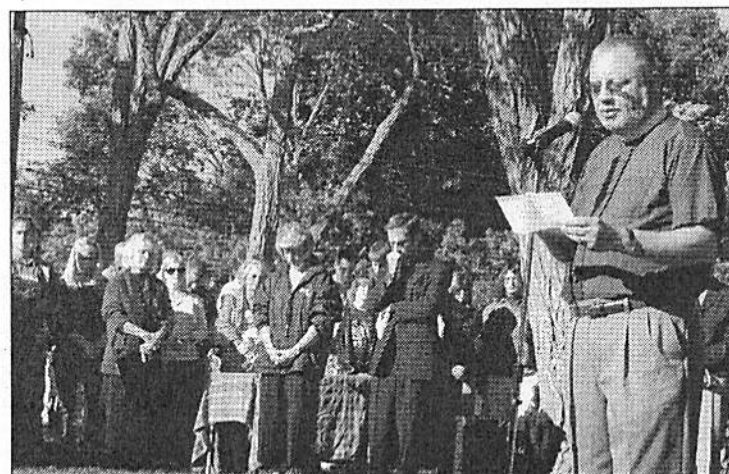
The female operator of one of the vehicles, Susan Durant, 58, of Middleboro, was seriously injured and was transported to Jordan Hospital by the Duxbury Fire Department. Durant later died of her injuries at the hospital.

While this story did not take into account accidents that took place on Route 3, there was a fatal accident along the highway in Duxbury in 2006.

On Feb. 26, 2006, a truck driven by 35-year-old Daniel

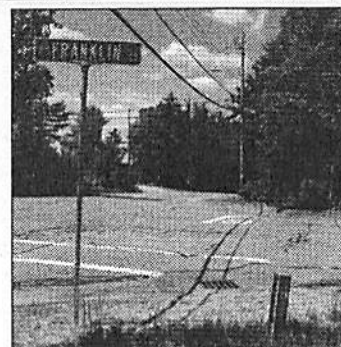


This 1986 Audi station wagon driven by Steven Laramée crashed into a tree on Union Bridge Road on Sept. 14, 2007. Laramée died in the crash, and his passengers, his brother Eoin and his friend Spencer Meine, were seriously injured.



The crash, and Laramée's death, hit the community hard. A rally was held to help his friends, loved ones and schoolmates deal with the tragedy.

Reddington struck an overpass. Reddington was killed, and the tragedy was compounded later that day. The owner of the company Reddington worked for, Ben Iannucci, collapsed upon hearing the news – the victim of a fatal heart attack.



A woman from Middleboro was killed in a three-car accident at the intersection of Franklin Street and Route 53 on Thursday, June 1, 2011.